1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

CHAPTER XXII

THE SUBMERGENCE OF TOLAMP

AND THE SUBSEQUENT WANDERINGS AND EXPLOITS OF ITS PEOPLE

A MIXTURE OF MYTH, LEGEND, AND FACT

MENTION has already been made of the submerged island of Tolamp, which once rose to the surface between Vao and Atchin and supported a flourishing population, but of which there remains now nothing but a submerged reef marked only by the ceaseless breaking of the surf, round which the natives fish, and which appears on the Admiralty chart under the prosaic name of Bracey Patch. We have seen how the inhabitants of this former island, owing to its position immediately southward of Vao, received the new forms of Maki ritual emanating from the south sooner than Vao, and that this superior social position is still held by the few survivors who are now refugees on Vao, and are still looked up to as "first men" of the Maki and given corresponding precedence in all Maki rites. We have seen also that, after the submergence of their island and before giving up their identity as an individual community, there was a period during which they were established on the mainland of Malekula, where they erected a giant monolith taller than any such monument known in the whole archipelago, and left behind them memorials such as the stone pig reproduced in Plate XI.

The tale of the submergence of this island, and of the subsequent wanderings of its people, is told both on Vao and on Atchin in a number of versions which on analysis suggest that the actual catastrophe occurred about 200 years ago. While agreeing in the main facts, however, these versions differ considerably in detail, and provide such an interesting example of the accretion of mythological factors on to what was without doubt an actual seismic occurrence [1] that I have no hesitation in giving them, so far as they have been recorded, in full.

Tolamp and Mal-weaweng.

The Atchin name for the island as spoken by the younger generation is Tonlap, and by the old men is Tonlamp, which approaches more

[1] Compare the alteration in the configuration of the south-west corner of Ambrim in 1913 owing to volcanic action (see p. 228, note 1).